

USE OF SEXED/GENDER BIASED SEMEN ON WISCONSIN DAIRY FARMS

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You've no doubt heard arguments from both sides of the table about whether or not sexed semen is worth it. On the one hand, it is supposed to increase the percentage of heifers born. On the other hand, fertility is generally compromised. Some people seem to be having great success with it, while others have had terrible luck. If the stories weren't enough to contend with, there is added confusion over the difference between sexed semen and gender biased semen.

What is the difference between sexed and gender biased semen?

While differences do exist, these terms are often used interchangeably.

Sexed semen, which is marketed by all major AI companies, sorts the male and female sperm using the Beltsville Method. With this method, one can expect:

- About 80 to 85% of normal conception rates on non-lactating heifers.
- Approximately 90% of calves should be female.
- Not recommended in lactating dairy cattle due to dramatic reduction in fertility.

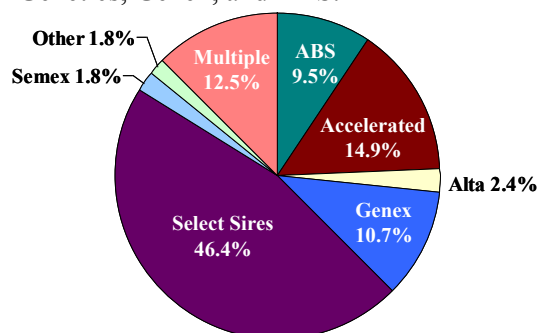
Gender biased semen (Bovitel) is another product marketed by Accelerated Genetics, in which sperm are not actually sorted.

- Expect a much smaller increase in percentage of female calves (approximately 10%).
- Fertility should not be compromised.

Several UW-Extension county agriculture agents handed out a total of 347 surveys during the winter of 2007-08 primarily at producer meetings. All responses were optional. Proportionate numbers of responses were received to reflect the distribution of herd sizes in Wisconsin. Of the 347 surveys that were completed, 309 were dairy farmers, and 38 were heifer growers.

Who is using sexed semen and where are they getting it?

Based on survey responses, nearly half of those surveyed are getting their sexed semen from Select Sires, while similar proportions buy from Accelerated Genetics, Genex, and ABS.



Far more heifer growers are using sexed semen than are dairy farmers. Nearly half of the dairy farmers surveyed have never even tried sexed semen.

	Dairy Farmers	Heifer Growers
Currently Using	39%	63%
Never Used	53%	29%
Discontinued	8%	8%

Why are people using sexed semen?

Approximately two thirds of dairy producers surveyed plan to increase their herd size over the next 5 years, while a third plans to maintain the same herd size. Of those planning to increase cow numbers, 12% plan to increase their herd size by 50% or more, a third plan to add 10-50% to their current herd size, and 21% plan to up cow numbers by 1-10%.

When asked the number one reason for using sexed semen, nearly half (48%) said that it was to expand the herd from within. The second most important reason was to get more females from their best cows (24%).

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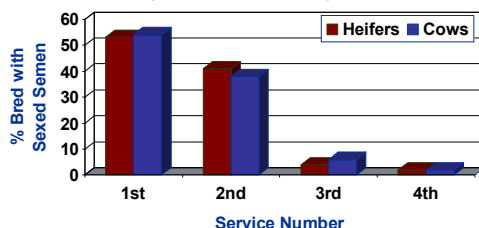


Criteria for When Sexed Semen is Used

Service number was the number one criteria in determining when sexed semen would be used (30%). Not far behind was genetic merit of female (29%), followed by type of breeding (15%).

Sexed semen using the Beltsville method is only recommended for use on first service, non-lactating heifers in good standing heat.

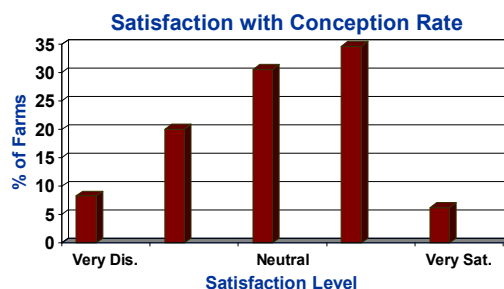
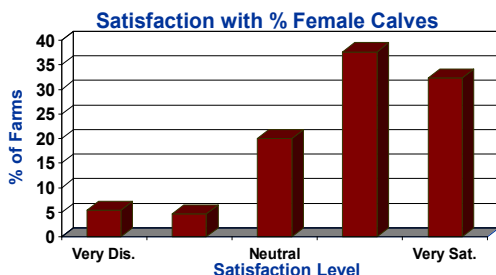
Services for which Sexed Semen is Used (Beltsville Method)



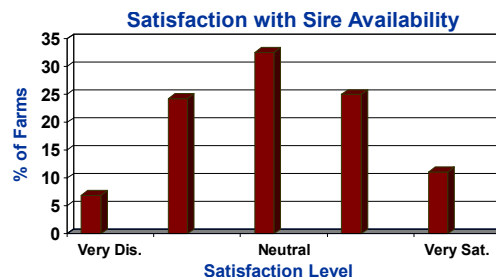
A high percentage of producers are using sexed semen on both first *and* second service for both heifers *and* cows. It is important to note that sexed semen is used on only a small percentage of cows.

Satisfaction With Sexed Semen

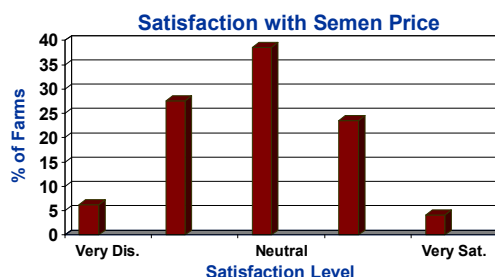
Farmers currently using sexed semen were asked to rank their satisfaction level for several factors. On a scale of 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied), farmers were somewhat satisfied (mean = 3.87) with the percentage of female calves born.



Similar satisfaction levels were achieved with conception rate (mean = 3.10) and sire availability (mean = 3.09). The biggest



dissatisfaction with sexed semen came from the higher price (mean = 2.92).



Reasons for Not Using Sexed Semen

Nearly equal percentages of farmers said the number one reason they don't use sexed semen is that they are simply uninterested (25%), or poor fertility (24%) or higher price (23%) is keeping them from using it.

Reasons for Discontinuing Sexed Semen

Many producers (42%) had reasons other than semen price, dissatisfaction with sex ratio, or poor fertility for discontinuing the use of sexed semen. However, nearly a third (31%) had quit because of poor fertility.

Like any other product on the market, you need to weigh the costs and the benefits of sexed semen. The purpose of this survey was to help clarify how sexed semen is being used in the industry, as well as gather opinions from producers using, not using, or discontinued using sexed semen.

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